Contending Heidegger

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A Philosophical and Theological Analysis of S. C. Sayles's *Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger*

Abstract

Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927) inaugurated one of the most profound turns in twentieth-century thought: the retrieval of the question of Being after the exhaustion of metaphysics. Yet, as S. C. Sayles argues in *Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger*, that very retrieval conceals a deeper forgetting—the eclipse of Revelation by ontology, the substitution of the Word with *Being*. This paper offers a philosophical and theological analysis of Sayles's Logos-centred reading of Heidegger, situating it within the Reformed tradition's metaphysical and epistemological framework. Sayles contends that Heidegger's *history of Being* represents not an emancipation from theology but an inverted form of it: "the grammar of faith without its God." Against this, the Reformed vision restores the Creator–creature distinction, grounding all meaning in the divine Logos, the uncreated Word through whom all things exist.

Through close engagement with Heidegger's key texts—*Being and Time*, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *Letter on Humanism*, and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*—and with Sayles's critical theology, this study demonstrates how the crisis of Being is, in fact, the crisis of Revelation. The argument unfolds across seven sections: from Heidegger's phenomenological genesis to his political and poetic turns, from the exile of the Logos to the doxological recovery of the Word. In dialogue with Augustine, Calvin, Van Til, and Henry, Sayles constructs a Logos-centred

ontology in which revelation restores what philosophy remembers only as nostalgia. The conclusion affirms that the clearing of Being finds its true light only at the Cross, where silence becomes speech and the foundation once rejected is laid in Christ.

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1. Introduction — The Crisis of Ground and the Need for a Logos-Centred Ontology

“Philosophy is always homeless until it finds its dwelling in the Word.” — S. C. Sayles

I. The Modern Collapse of Foundation

The modern philosophical imagination has lived for centuries upon borrowed ground. Since Descartes, the quest for certainty has been conducted within the limits of self-enclosed reason. The Cogito replaced Creation; the thinking subject assumed the function once ascribed to God. From Descartes to Kant, from Hegel to Nietzsche, the history of modernity may be read as the progressive internalisation of transcendence—the slow translation of *Deus Deus absconditus* into *homo absconditus*. Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God was not discovery but completion: the moment when the borrowed metaphysical capital finally ran out. What remained was a void still echoing with theological grammar, a silence still shaped like prayer.

It is into this void that Martin Heidegger stepped. *Being and Time* begins not with scepticism but with astonishment: *“The question of the meaning of Being must be asked anew.”* To ask what it means *to be* is to recognise that philosophy, for all its analytic mastery, has forgotten its ground. Heidegger’s project, therefore, is both diagnosis and retrieval: to awaken the memory of Being that metaphysics has buried under its own categories. Yet in that very awakening lies the risk of inversion—for the voice that remembers Being while denying the Word speaks in paradoxical faith.

II. Sayles’s Central Thesis

S. C. Sayles reads Heidegger as the prophet of this paradox. In *Without Foundation* he calls *Being and Time* "probably one of the greatest books in history," not for its orthodoxy but for its magnitude of error. The admiration is sincere; the sorrow is theological. Heidegger's genius, Sayles writes, is that "he heard the reverberation of creation after the Word had been silenced." The philosopher's clearing (*Lichtung*) is thus the echo of revelation without presence—the structure of faith deprived of grace.

Sayles's Logos-centred ontology begins precisely where Heidegger's ends. If Heidegger's project is the *history of Being*, Sayles's counter-project is the *theology of the Word*. For him, the crisis of Being is inseparable from the crisis of Revelation: the intellect's refusal to confess its dependence on the Logos. Where Heidegger seeks foundation within the immanence of Being, Sayles locates it in the transcendence of the Word made flesh. His method is not merely theological polemic but philosophical reconstruction: to show that ontology, rightly understood, is itself a function of revelation. "Being," he insists, "is the echo; the Word is the voice."

III. Methodological Orientation

This study adopts Sayles's own dialectical pattern: critique and confession. The analysis proceeds through the *antithesis*—a concept derived from Cornelius Van Til's Reformed epistemology, which asserts the irreducible opposition between human autonomy and divine revelation. There is no neutral thought; every philosophy is covenantal. Heidegger's phenomenology of Being is therefore not merely speculative metaphysics but a mode of unbelief seeking coherence. By placing Heidegger's thought under the light of Scripture, Sayles exposes its theological unconscious—the trace of dependence that persists within revolt. The aim is neither denunciation nor dismissal but redemption of meaning. As Carl F. H. Henry writes, "Revelation is God's own interpretation of reality." If this is true, then the failure of philosophy is not its daring but its deafness.

IV. Structure and Scope

The sections that follow trace a double movement: first outward through Heidegger's intellectual history—the phenomenological genesis, the existential analytic, the political fall, the poetic turn—and then inward toward the theological centre where the Logos restores what the clearing concealed. Each stage of Heidegger's journey is read as both philosophical achievement and theological confession. The analysis culminates in a doxological resolution, affirming that "the foundation once rejected has become the cornerstone." By situating Sayles's Logos-centred ontology within the broader Reformed tradition—from Augustine's *Confessions* and Calvin's *Institutes* to Van Til's *The Defense of the Faith* and Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There*—the paper seeks to demonstrate that the only adequate response to the crisis of Being is the recovery of the Word.

V. Thesis Statement

Heidegger's project, while formally atheological, remains structurally theological; it is the ghost of faith translated into ontology. Sayles's *Without Foundation* exposes this ghost and re-clothes it with revelation. The Logos, not Being, is the true ground of existence; the Word, not silence, is the end of philosophy. To re-ground thought in the Word is to restore both meaning and worship—to recover metaphysics as doxology.

2 — Heidegger's Quest for Ground: From Phenomenology to Ontology

"Every philosophy that forgets to kneel will build a tower instead of a temple." — S. C. Sayles

I. The Phenomenological Inheritance

Heidegger's early apprenticeship under Edmund Husserl at Freiburg was decisive for the form—but not the spirit—of *Being and Time*. From the *Logical Investigations* to the *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl had sought the "things themselves," meaning the eidetic structures of consciousness independent of empirical contamination. Heidegger admired his teacher's precision but discerned a sterility at its heart: intentionality, though profound, was

lifeless. As he later remarked in his 1919 lecture courses, *“Philosophy must descend from system to life.”* The statement already contains the seed of rebellion; the transcendental ego would soon be replaced by *Dasein*—not the knower of objects, but the being who *is* his own question.

Heidegger’s notebooks from this period reveal the subterranean tremor beneath phenomenology’s rational surface. In one marginal note to Husserl’s lectures he scrawled, *“Science describes, but it does not suffer.”* That single verb, “suffer,” signals the movement from epistemology to ontology, from detached description to existential pathos. For the post-war German mind, exhausted by the collapse of empire and idealism alike, suffering had become the last credible evidence of reality. Heidegger thus transformed phenomenology from a theory of perception into a confession of presence. The philosopher must not analyse the world from without but inhabit it from within.

Sayles reads this transformation with both admiration and grief. In *Without Foundation* he observes that “Heidegger’s turn from Husserl was not toward nihilism but toward nostalgia—nostalgia for a ground that philosophy had already denied.” The young scholar’s longing for immediacy, Sayles argues, was the metaphysical residue of lost communion; it is the “shadow of prayer cast by an intellect that no longer prays.” Heidegger’s insistence that *“we are ourselves the entities to be analysed”* (GA 24, § 1) amounts, in Sayles’s judgment, to an unacknowledged confession of the *imago Dei*—the human as reflective mirror of the divine Word. The Reformed theologian sees here the trace of Genesis 1:26 in exile: the creature still bearing likeness after forgetting likeness’s Lord.

II. The Ontological Revolution

Being and Time (1927) opens with an audacious premise: that philosophy has for millennia discussed beings (*Seiendes*) without inquiring into Being (*Sein*) itself. This “oblivion of Being” (*Seinsvergessenheit*) becomes Heidegger’s central theme. The question “What is Being?” is not a mere curiosity but the most original act of thought—the *Urfrage* from which all knowledge derives. Yet, unlike classical metaphysics,

Heidegger does not seek an answer beyond experience; he seeks the disclosure of Being within existence itself. Hence the existential analytic of *Dasein*—the human being whose very essence lies in questioning its own being.

This turn from ontology as substance to ontology as experience marks what Sayles calls "the most antiluciditas reading of Genesis ever written." He deliberately coins the Latin *antiluciditas* to designate a brilliance turned against light: intellectual luminosity estranged from illumination. For Sayles, *Being and Time* is not ignorance of revelation but its inversion; it is theology without worship, a metaphysical psalm sung in minor key. "Heidegger," he writes, "did not deny the Word; he mistook it for grammar." The philosopher's method remains reverent in form but rebellious in aim: he kneels before mystery while refusing to name the God who speaks through it.

From the perspective of Reformed theology, this inversion illustrates what Calvin described as "the perpetual factory of idols" (*Institutes*, I.xi.8). The fallen intellect cannot cease to theologise; it can only misdirect its devotion. Hence Heidegger's *Sein* becomes the substitute deity of modern thought—the infinite without holiness, transcendence without personhood. Cornelius Van Til would call this "borrowed transcendence": the unbeliever's unavoidable dependence on the categories of revelation while denying their Source. As Van Til wrote in *The Defense of the Faith*, "Autonomous man must live in God's universe, and by that fact he confesses God even in his denial."

III. Dasein and the Noetic Effects of the Fall

The analytic of *Dasein*—care (*Sorge*), thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), and being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*)—constitutes the heart of Heidegger's existential project. Each structure of human existence reveals the finitude and anxiety intrinsic to being-in-the-world. "Care is the totality of the structural whole of Dasein's being" (*Sein und Zeit*, § 41). For Heidegger, to exist is to care; to be is to be concerned. Yet this concern, in his account, lacks object and origin. It is anxiety without sin, guilt without confession, mortality without judgment.

Sayles interprets these analyses as “phenomenology of the Fall without its theology.” The human finds himself thrown, but by whom? He is guilty, but before what law? The *Gewissen*—the conscience that calls—speaks, but whose voice does it bear? Heidegger leaves these questions suspended, defining conscience as “the call of care itself.” Sayles counters: “The conscience calls because the Creator speaks.” Here the Reformed anthropology intervenes: the restless heart of *Dasein* is the echo of Augustine’s *inquietum cor*. Romans 2:15 confirms it—“the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.” Heidegger’s existential structures thus become testimonies of suppression; they bear witness against themselves.

Van Til’s epistemology sharpens this point. He maintains that all knowledge is analogical: the creature can think only God’s thoughts after Him. When man attempts self-grounded understanding, he inevitably produces distortion. *Dasein*’s self-interpretation apart from its Creator therefore yields what Van Til terms “epistemological apostasy.” The Reformed theologian Francis Schaeffer restates it pastorally: “Man is not mute; he is fallen. His problem is not silence but disobedience.” In this light, Heidegger’s *Dasein* is not the beginning of philosophy but the confession of lost theology—the soul’s testimony that it cannot escape the conditions of creation.

IV. From Existential Analytic to Historical Destiny

Heidegger’s *Being and Time* was unfinished; the second part, meant to treat “time and Being,” was never written. Yet the incompletion itself is revelatory. In 1927 he wrote to Karl Jaspers: *“Only a god can still rescue philosophy.”* This early echo of his later confession in the *Der Spiegel* interview shows that Heidegger already sensed the theological vacuum beneath his ontological edifice. The ungrounded ground remained groundless. Sayles comments that “Heidegger built a cathedral of grammar whose foundations were still trembling.” The philosopher’s subsequent *Kehre*—his “turn” from existential analysis to the later meditations on language—may be read as an unconscious admission that ontology without Logos cannot stand.

For Sayles, the tragedy is metaphysical before it is moral. The intellect that refuses grace will seek glory elsewhere; the mind that rejects the Word will enthrone Being. This is why *Being and Time*, for all its brilliance, becomes what he calls "the psalter of exile." The hymns are still there, but the sanctuary is empty. The Reformed theologian reads the book, therefore, not as an enemy of faith but as its haunting. "Even in denial," Sayles writes, "Heidegger remains a theologian, for he still believes that truth must be revealed."

V. The Reformed Synthesis

Against the antiluciditas of *Being and Time*, Sayles offers the clarity of the Word. Revelation restores the dimension that ontology forgets: dependence. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28) is not an ontological metaphor but an epistemological axiom. The Logos is not one foundation among others but the very condition of foundation itself. Carl F. H. Henry articulates this in systematic form: "Revelation is the disclosure of divine meaning, not the discovery of human possibility." In the light of that disclosure, Heidegger's question of Being is transfigured: it becomes not the first question but the second, the creature's echo of the Creator's Word.

Thus the movement from phenomenology to ontology ends, in Sayles's analysis, as the movement from remembrance to repentance. Heidegger sought to recover the ground of philosophy; the Gospel declares that the ground has already come to him. The *Seinsfrage* ("question of Being") becomes, under the Cross, the *Kerygma* ("proclamation of grace"). To think Being truly is to worship the Word.

3 — The Rectorate and the Political Fall: Ontology in the Shadow of Power

"When thought kneels to power, it ceases to be thought." — S. C. Sayles
"The LORD is known by the judgment which He executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." — Psalm 9 : 16

I. The Historical Context: The Year of Temptation

In 1933 Germany stood at the threshold of catastrophe. The Weimar dream had decayed into inflation, humiliation, and ideological rage; the universities—once Europe's sanctuaries of reason—became laboratories of despair. Into this maelstrom Martin Heidegger ascended as Rector of Freiburg University, pledging intellectual renewal under the sign of the swastika. His inaugural address, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* ("The Self-Assertion of the German University"), fused ontology with nationalism: the rebirth of the academy through the destiny (*Geschick*) of the Volk.

He declared:

"The Führer himself and he alone is the present and future German reality and its law."

This sentence, later withdrawn but never forgotten, epitomises what Sayles calls "the collision of metaphysics and idolatry." The thinker who once sought Being's truth now anointed political will as its embodiment. What began as an ontological question became a liturgy of blood and soil.

Sayles's judgment is severe but theological: "Heidegger's Rectorate was not a political lapse only; it was metaphysics incarnating itself in flesh unredeemed." The temptation was not power per se, but incarnation without Logos—the mind attempting to embody its own abstraction. In Reformed language, the intellect succumbed to the primal sin of Genesis 3: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

II. The Inaugural Address: Ontology Turned Liturgy

The 1933 address proclaimed a "new spiritual mission" of the German university: to serve the destiny of the nation through *Wissenschaft*, work, and will. Heidegger invoked "the inner truth and greatness of this movement," later glossed cryptically as "the encounter between global technology and modern man." Yet, stripped of retrospective nuance, the text reveals a substitution of covenant with destiny: *Being* becomes *Volk*, revelation becomes race, history replaces holiness.

Sayles interprets the address as a parody of Pentecost. "The tongues of fire were there," he writes, "but they descended

from ideology, not heaven." The philosopher's call for "spiritual mobilisation" is read as the attempt to re-sacralise the secular: to transform political enthusiasm into ersatz revelation. In this sense, the Rectorate was philosophy's experiment in creating a civic Logos—an unholy word made flesh.

Cornelius Van Til's doctrine of the *antithesis* clarifies the failure. Human thought cannot operate on neutral ground; it is either in obedience or in revolt. Heidegger imagined a third realm, where metaphysical insight could guide politics without grace. The result, Van Til would say, was "autonomy enthroned in uniform." Carl F. H. Henry, writing after the war, echoed the same discernment: "When revelation is rejected, ideology becomes theology's ghost."

III. The Noetic Consequence: The Intellect Darkened

The Rectorate years expose the moral dimension of what Sayles elsewhere calls *antiluciditas*—light turned against itself. Heidegger's thought did not descend into darkness by ignorance but by inversion. Romans 1 : 21–22 traces the pattern precisely: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." The philosopher who sought to restore Being to thought now bound Being to the Führerprinzip, baptising immanence in the language of destiny.

In Sayles's reading, the event demonstrates the noetic effects of sin on even the loftiest intellect: "The mind that refuses the true Foundation will sanctify whatever ground remains beneath its feet." Calvin foresaw this pathology in his commentary on Isaiah 44, describing the idol-maker who "falls down to that which he has carved." So too the modern metaphysician carves concepts and then bows before them.

Francis Schaeffer, reflecting on the ideological century, observed: "Modern man has his feet planted firmly in mid-air." Heidegger, Sayles suggests, attempted to build a floor of thought strong enough to stand upon; the result was a scaffold around the abyss.

IV. Repentance and Silence

After the war, Heidegger retreated to his hut in Todtnauberg. When questioned in 1945 about his complicity, he replied evasively that the Rectorate had been "an error of engagement." To Karl Jaspers he confessed only, *"I am still without ground."* Sayles interprets this phrase as both confession and tragedy. "He recognised his fall," he writes, "but not the Fall." The philosopher's silence became what Sayles calls "atonement by vocabulary"—seeking absolution through redefinition rather than repentance.

From the Reformed standpoint, such silence is precisely what Romans 3 : 19 names as the purpose of divine law: "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." True repentance begins where self-interpretation ends. Augustine's *Confessions* and Calvin's *Institutes* both insist that knowledge of self arises only in the mirror of grace. Heidegger's self-examination, by contrast, remains dialectical: he interprets guilt as structure rather than sin, destiny rather than disobedience.

Van Til would call this the "ethical evasion of metaphysics." To acknowledge guilt without grace is to convert confession into anthropology. The result is a conscience that still calls but cannot name the Caller.

V. The Theological Reading of Political Idolatry

Sayles reads the Rectorate through the lens of biblical idolatry: not as aberration but as inevitable outcome of unanchored thought. Just as Israel demanded a visible king to replace the invisible Lord (1 Samuel 8), so philosophy, weary of abstraction, demanded embodiment. Heidegger's allegiance to Hitler was thus a metaphysical event: *Being* incarnated in flesh without Spirit. "He attempted the Incarnation of ontology," Sayles writes, "and discovered the Crucifixion of reason."

This diagnosis aligns with the Reformed principle that all idolatry is intellectual before it is material. As Calvin stated, "The human mind is a perpetual forge of idols." To bow before power, nation, or race is only the social manifestation of a prior spiritual rebellion—the substitution of *ens* for *Elohim*.

Scripture's answer to such idolatry is not philosophical correction but divine jealousy. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." The Lord's intolerance of rivals is not insecurity but ontology: only the self-existent can sustain existence. Hence, the political fall of Heidegger becomes emblematic of the metaphysical fall of modernity itself—the worship of created meaning severed from Creator.

VI. Sayles's Theological Resolution

For Sayles, the Rectorate tragedy does not negate Heidegger's philosophical greatness; it reveals its cost. The same mind capable of perceiving Being's profundity could not bear its own dependence. "He sought foundation," Sayles writes, "and mistook the abyss for depth." Yet Sayles refuses triumphalism. His tone is elegiac, not scornful. Heidegger remains for him "the prodigal of metaphysics"—brilliant, wounded, and still awaited by grace.

The Reformed tradition tempers judgment with doctrine. If total depravity corrupts every faculty, then even genius bears the stain; but if common grace endures, then even error can bear witness to truth. Thus Sayles concludes that "the Rectorate stands as the negative parable of incarnation—the intellect attempting to become flesh without the Word." Where the Logos humbled Himself to serve, philosophy exalted itself to rule. The former redeemed the world; the latter joined its ruin.

VII. The Scriptural Antithesis

The biblical antithesis could not be sharper:

- *"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."* (John 1 : 14)
- *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD."* (Psalm 2 : 2)

Heidegger's fall illustrates the perpetual contest between these two incarnations—the Word descending in grace and the word ascending in pride. Sayles frames it succinctly: "Philosophy sought to redeem history; theology confesses that history is redeemed."

VIII. Toward Redemption of Meaning

The lesson of the Rectorate, then, is not the futility of thought but its necessity under grace. When the intellect bows again before the Word, its brilliance is transfigured rather than extinguished. “Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 1 : 18): divine invitation, not divine dismissal. Sayles’s project therefore turns the Rectorate inside out: the same structure that enslaved thought to power can, under revelation, become service to truth.

The Reformed vision restores philosophy to its priestly vocation—to interpret creation in praise of the Creator. In that light, the political fall of 1933 becomes an eschatological parable: Babel once more collapsing before Pentecost.

4 — The Kehre and the Turn to Language: From Ontology to Poetics

“Where the Word departs, words proliferate.” — S. C. Sayles
“In the beginning was the Word … and without Him was not anything made that was made.” — John 1 : 1–3

I. From Being to Language

After *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger entered what he later called *die Kehre* — the turn. No longer content to analyse *Dasein* as the site of disclosure, he began to speak of Being itself as that which “gives” (*es gibt Sein*). The focus shifted from human existence to the event (*Ereignis*) through which Being grants presence. Yet the new vocabulary, though stylistically luminous, concealed a deep displacement: the Word was replaced by Being, and Being was relocated into Language.

In *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959) Heidegger declares, > “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.” Words no longer describe; they reveal. Meaning is not given by intention but bestowed by the mystery of speech itself. The human being becomes the “shepherd of the word,” guarding language as the sanctuary of truth.

Sayles interprets this as the final metamorphosis of Heidegger's metaphysics: "Having lost the Word of God, he sought salvation in grammar. He abducted the word *logos* from the Church and left it homeless. He thought he had saved the word, but he lost the Word." In his reading, *die Kehre* is not merely a philosophical development but a spiritual symptom — the attempt to recover revelation by aesthetics after the rejection of faith.

II. The Poetic Turn: Hölderlin and the Recovery of Sacred Speech

Heidegger's fascination with the poet Friedrich Hölderlin became central to his later writings. In "Poetically Man Dwells" and "The Ister," he argues that the poet alone can "name the holy" and prepare the coming of the gods. Philosophy had exhausted itself in concepts; poetry must now restore the mystery of Being. Yet this restoration occurs without the Creator. The divine is evoked as absence, the sacred as silence. The result is what Sayles calls "adoration without address."

Quoting Heidegger: > "Only a god can save us now; the poet names the coming god."
Sayles responds: > "The God who comes has already come, and the poet's vocabulary cannot resurrect a revelation that only the Spirit can incarnate."

The Reformed tradition reads this poetic turn as the final stage of fallen reason — the transmutation of theology into aesthetics. Francis Schaeffer warned that "modern man seeks salvation in symbols when he no longer believes in truth." For Carl F. H. Henry, language itself is not self-grounded but derivative of divine speech: "Revelation is verbal because God is a speaking God." Thus the Word restores what poetry can only approximate — meaning as grace.

III. Language as Dwelling and the Suppression of Revelation

In the later essays of *Holzwege* and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Heidegger meditates on the relationship between language and truth (*aletheia*). Truth is no longer correspondence or

coherence but un-concealment, the event where Being grants presence through speech. He writes, > “Language is the lighting that illuminates and withdraws.” The revelatory imagery is unmistakable, yet the illuminator remains nameless. It is as if Genesis 1 were rewritten without the “Let there be.”

Sayles remarks that Heidegger “turned the speech of God into the grammar of Being.” His critique is not merely doctrinal but ontological: when language is divinised, meaning becomes immanent and grace becomes style. What was once communication between Creator and creature collapses into the echo of self-revelation.

Reformed theology restores the asymmetry. In the doctrine of *creatio verbi* (creation through the Word), speech is a gift, not a ground. Calvin declares in his commentary on Genesis 1 that “the divine Fiat is the foundation of the world.” Every human utterance therefore participates analogically in that original speech-act. Language is not Being’s house but God’s instrument; it is a covenantal medium, not a metaphysical dwelling. Henry echoes this when he insists that “revelation is a rational and linguistic communication from God to man.” To invert this order is to deify the sign and silence the Speaker.

IV. The Kehre as Confession and Parable

Sayles does not dismiss Heidegger’s turn outright. He reads it as the confession of a mind haunted by its own silence. “Every metaphysical turn,” he writes, “is either repentance or recoil.” The *Kehre* reveals a philosopher who could no longer endure his own abstraction; he sought communion through language because he could not pray. In this sense, the turn to poetry is a fallen liturgical gesture — the prodigal mind writing its way home.

Scripture again frames the antithesis. The Psalmist confesses, *“I believed, therefore have I spoken”* (Ps. 116 : 10). For Heidegger, the order is reversed: he speaks in order to believe. But faith cannot be generated by syntax; it is the gift of the Spirit. As Paul writes, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10 : 17). Sayles draws this

contrast with characteristic economy: “Language without revelation is speech without Spirit.”

Van Til’s epistemology provides the structural basis for this judgment. Because all knowledge is analogical, even the act of speaking presupposes the divine Speaker. The unbeliever’s eloquence is therefore a borrowed grace. The *Kehre*, from this angle, becomes a parable of epistemological dependence: the attempt to found language autonomously only confirms its creatureliness.

V. The Reformed Reversal

Sayles concludes that Heidegger’s linguistic turn unintentionally confesses the truth it denies. By making language the medium of disclosure, he testifies that revelation is indispensable; by withholding the Revealer, he confirms the Fall. Thus, Heidegger’s poetics become the negative image of theology — the silhouette of the Word.

The Reformed response is therefore not to abolish Heidegger’s insight but to transfigure it. The true *Kehre* is from language to Logos, from Being’s gift to the Giver. The “house of Being” is re-founded as the “temple of the Word.” The Spirit indwells language as once He filled the Tabernacle; speech becomes praise when it is returned to its Source. Calvin’s prayer closes the circle: *“O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth Thy praise.”* (Ps. 51 : 15).

5 — The Poet and the Silence: The Final Years and the Waiting for the Last God

“He waited for what had already come.” — S. C. Sayles
“But we are not saved by waiting for another; we look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” — Titus 2 : 13

I. The Retreat to Todtnauberg

After the collapse of the Third Reich and the devastation of the war, Heidegger retreated to his hut in Todtnauberg, a small wooden dwelling on the slopes of the Black Forest. There he wrote, erased, and rewrote, filling notebooks with aphorisms

and meditations. Visitors often described him sitting for hours in silence, staring at the treeline or listening to the wind.

For Heidegger, this withdrawal was not exile but method. In his *Spiegel* interview (1966, published posthumously), he confessed: > “Only a god can save us.” The remark was not resignation but expectation — the philosopher as watchman waiting for an arrival that never comes. He believed that thought must now prepare the “readiness for the appearance of Being.”

Sayles interprets the hut as both symbol and sacrament of modern exile: “The mind that rejects the temple must build a hut.” The simplicity of Todtnauberg became, for him, the image of metaphysical poverty — a thinker who had left the cathedrals of theology and the laboratories of science, seeking a home for meaning in the forest of solitude. Yet Sayles notes the pathos beneath the serenity: “He waited for Being to speak because he would not hear the Word who already had.”

II. The Myth of the Last God

In Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (*Contributions to Philosophy [From Enowning]*, written 1936–38, published 1989), he introduces the notion of *der letzte Gott* — the “last god.” This god is not the Christian Creator, nor the pagan pantheon, but a mysterious coming presence who will reawaken Being from its technological slumber. Heidegger writes: > “The last god is not the end but the other beginning of history.”

Here myth and metaphysics converge. The “last god” is not worshipped but awaited; not transcendent, but immanent within destiny (*Geschick*). The longing is religious, the language mystical, yet the horizon remains closed. Sayles interprets this concept as “a cry from a conscience that remembers Eden but has forgotten the covenant.” He continues: “The last god is not a deity but a delay — the echo of the Word deferred.”

In Reformed theology, this waiting is the very definition of unbelief. Scripture teaches that the true *eschaton* has already entered history in the Incarnate Logos. “When the fullness of

time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4 : 4). There can be no "last god" because the First and the Last has already spoken (Revelation 22 : 13). Heidegger's myth, therefore, becomes the metaphysical parody of Advent: expectation without incarnation, hope without object.

III. Silence as Method and as Judgment

Heidegger's post-war writing is marked by what he called *Gelassenheit* — "releasement" or "letting-be." It is a discipline of waiting, a renunciation of technological mastery and metaphysical system alike. In *Gelassenheit* (1959) he writes: > "We let ourselves into the openness of that which is mysterious, and we wait." Silence, for him, becomes the purest form of thinking.

Sayles's theological reading transforms this quietism into confession. "Silence before the Word is worship," he writes, "but silence instead of the Word is judgment." The philosopher's restraint is admirable as humility but tragic as unbelief. To *let-be* is not to repent; to wait for revelation without prayer is to wait without hearing.

Cornelius Van Til offers the epistemological key: every act of waiting presupposes a world already spoken into being. The creature cannot suspend relation to the Creator without living in contradiction. Hence, Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* is not neutrality but revolt disguised as reverence. Calvin identifies the same pattern in his *Institutes* (I.4.3): "The human mind, even when it seeks God, does not go straight forward, but, while groping, falls away into its own imaginations." Silence, unguided by grace, becomes idolatry of the unsaid.

IV. The Hermeneutics of Waiting

The later Heidegger described the vocation of thinking as *Bereitschaft* — readiness. In *Zur Sache des Denkens* (*On the Matter of Thinking*, 1969) he insists that philosophy's task is to "prepare a clearing for the arrival of Being." Sayles's response is both sympathetic and sorrowful: "He prepared the clearing, but it was already filled. The Light had come, and men loved darkness rather than light."

Sayles interprets Heidegger's readiness as the negative image of Christian hope. Biblical hope is not open expectation but covenantal confidence; it looks not for "a god" but for the returning Lord. As Paul writes, "We have a sure anchor of the soul" (Hebrews 6 : 19). By contrast, Heidegger's *Bereitschaft* is an openness without anchor, a hospitality without guest. It is, in Sayles's phrase, "eschatology without Gospel."

Francis Schaeffer captures the same contrast when he writes: "The modern man waits, but he waits for nothing certain, because he has removed the personal God who alone can promise." In that sense, Heidegger's late thought becomes both diagnosis and symptom of the modern mind: haunted by transcendence, but unable to name it.

V. The Reformed Reading of Silence and Speech

Reformed theology sees silence not as the goal of thought but its purification. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46 : 10) is not an invitation to emptiness but to acknowledgment. The biblical silence is receptive, not self-generated; it listens to a Voice that precedes it. Heidegger's silence, by contrast, waits for a word that will arise from within Being itself. This is why Sayles calls his later philosophy "repentance without Redeemer."

Carl F. H. Henry identifies this inversion as the essence of modern religious philosophy: "Man seeks divine encounter without divine speech." Yet God's self-disclosure is not event but address. "The Word became flesh" (John 1 : 14) means that speech itself has entered history, and that history cannot return to pre-verbal mysticism without apostasy. The Logos, once incarnate, cannot be replaced by silence without blasphemy.

Sayles writes: "Heidegger's silence was not empty—it was crowded with the unspoken Name." Every deferral of the Word becomes, paradoxically, testimony to its persistence. Even the philosopher's refusal to pray reveals the residual structure of prayer: longing for Presence. Romans 8 : 26 sanctifies that paradox—"the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Heidegger's silence is the world's groan misheard as profundity.

VI. The Theological Resolution

Sayles's ultimate evaluation of the later Heidegger is profoundly charitable. He does not condemn him as apostate but recognises him as modernity's penitent. "Heidegger's philosophy," he writes, "is Europe's confession that thought cannot save itself." The philosopher who began with ontology ended with supplication; the man who analysed care died in longing. For Sayles, this is not failure but witness — the negative space that makes grace intelligible.

Reformed theology completes that confession: where Heidegger awaited the "last god," the believer beholds the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Where he stood at the edge of speech, Scripture proclaims that the Word has spoken once and for all. The true *Gelassenheit* is not letting-be but letting-God-be-God. "Thy will be done" is the redeemed form of "letting-be." It is surrender with address, patience with promise, silence suffused with praise.

VII. Doxological Conclusion

Thus, the hut at Todtnauberg stands as a monument to both the splendour and the poverty of unaided reason. Surrounded by pines, the philosopher built his hermitage of wood; surrounded by eternity, he still waited for a voice from the trees. Sayles closes this arc with words that echo both pathos and benediction:

"He sought Being and found longing; he listened for the silence and the Word was already speaking. The forest was not empty—it was waiting to be named again."

For the Christian mind, the silence of Heidegger becomes the invitation of the Logos. "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3 : 15). The waiting of the world ends not in the coming of another god but in the returning of the same Christ. Philosophy's vigil thus concludes in theology's dawn: the hut becomes a tabernacle, and the silence a psalm.

6 — The Foundation and the Word: What Remains After the Silence

“He built a house of thought, but forgot its cornerstone.” — S. C. Sayles
“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” — 1 Corinthians 3 : 11

I. The Ruins of Metaphysics

By the end of his life Heidegger had deconstructed every pillar of classical philosophy. Substance, subject, truth, God—all had been dissolved into the event of disclosure. What remained was not a system but a site: the *Lichtung*, the clearing in which Being “lets beings be.” Yet when the dust of metaphysics settled, the clearing looked suspiciously like a ruin.

Sayles summarises the tragedy: “He cleared the ground for truth but left it empty of the True.” The philosopher who had spent fifty years dismantling idols discovered that demolition is not salvation. Calvin warned precisely of this futility: “To pull down the false gods without setting up the true is to people the temple of the mind with worse phantoms.” (*Institutes*, I.11.8.) Heidegger’s courage to face the void must therefore be honoured—but his refusal to kneel before its Maker must be mourned.

II. The Question After All Questions

In *Zur Sache des Denkens* (1969) Heidegger confessed that the task of thought was to “prepare a readiness for the coming of Being.” It is a beautiful and terrible line: philosophy reduced to waiting for what it cannot summon. Sayles calls this “repentance without Redeemer.” It is not cynicism but contrition without comfort, confession without absolution.

For the Reformed theologian, the final question—What remains?—is not rhetorical. It exposes the created structure of dependence. Van Til wrote, “The creature’s question is already God’s answer, for it presupposes the ground of being it seeks.” Every honest doubt borrows the stability of the truth it denies. Hence the very persistence of Heidegger’s inquiry is indirect testimony to revelation: thought remembers what sin forgets.

III. From Clearing to Covenant

Heidegger's *Lichtung*—the open space of disclosure—finds its analogue not in pagan groves but in the biblical covenant. When the Lord appeared to Abram, He said, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17 : 1). The open place between God and man is not emptiness but relationship. Revelation, not Being, constitutes openness.

Sayles therefore interprets the clearing as "creation waiting for covenant." The philosopher's fascination with space, light, and presence are not wrong but misdirected; they are the residues of theology purified of its subject. In Reformed categories, the clearing is common grace made conscious. Yet grace unacknowledged becomes judgment: the open field with no altar.

Calvin's commentary on John 1 identifies the antidote: "The Word was the light of men; without Him all splendour is mere deceit." To inhabit the clearing without the Word is to stand in daylight with closed eyes.

IV. Logos and the Restoration of Ground

Sayles's constructive response begins where Heidegger ends. "The Word before Being," he writes, "is the ground before ground." The Logos is not an ontological layer beneath beings but the personal foundation that gives reality both structure and sense. Being does not "give"; it is given. The Reformed confession of *creatio ex nihilo* re-establishes what philosophy mistook for destiny: the world is spoken, not self-manifested.

Carl F. H. Henry formulates the principle with scholastic precision: "Revelation is God's interpretation of reality." That interpretation is not occasional but continual: every act of knowing presupposes God's self-communication. In this sense, theology restores ontology by returning speech to its Speaker. Heidegger's "house of Being" becomes, under grace, "the temple of the Word."

Van Til's analogy completes the architecture. Because man is made in God's image, his reason is analogical; it functions correctly only when subordinate. The creature's concepts echo divine decrees. To think truly, therefore, is already to

participate in covenantal correspondence—the redeemed form of the *Lichtung*.

V. The Reformation of Language

The Reformed doctrine of inspiration transforms Heidegger's linguistic insight. "Language is the house of Being," he said; Scripture replies, "Language is the speech of God." The Bible is not one linguistic event among others but the charter of meaning itself. As Calvin remarks, "God lisps to us as nurses are wont to do with infants." Divine condescension sanctifies language precisely by humbling it.

Sayles re-phrases this with crystalline brevity: "Meaning is mercy made audible." In this axiom lies the whole Reformed theology of revelation. Every word that discloses truth is grace in grammatical form. Heidegger glimpsed the phenomenon; he lacked the theology to name the Giver. His silence is therefore not emptiness but echo—grace overheard but unacknowledged.

VI. The Antithesis and the Restoration of Thought

For Van Til and Schaeffer alike, the chasm between the Christian and the Heideggerian worldview is absolute. Either Being is self-existent or it is derivative; either the Word is Creator or creation is divine. There is no middle ground. Schaeffer warned that "modern man has both feet planted firmly in mid-air," a description that might serve as epitaph for the whole continental enterprise.

Yet Sayles tempers the antithesis with charity. "Heidegger's abyss," he writes, "was the shadow cast by Sinai." The philosopher's sense of distance was accurate; only his direction was reversed. To perceive the transcendence of Being without acknowledging its holiness is to stand at the foot of the mountain but refuse to ascend. In Christ, the same fire that terrifies becomes illumination: *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 4 : 6).

Thus the redemption of meaning is not merely epistemological but Christological. The Logos does not repair philosophy; He

resurrects it. He transforms the clearing into covenant, the silence into song, and the question into confession.

VII. Doxological Resolution

In his final years Heidegger wrote, “Thinking is thanking.” The phrase is hauntingly close to truth; it almost breaks into worship. Sayles, reflecting on that line, concludes his own meditation:

“He almost found it. To think is indeed to thank—but only when the thanksgiving is to the Logos. Gratitude without address is still grief.”

Here philosophy ends and theology begins. The Reformed mind does not despise Heidegger’s striving; it baptises it. The true *Kehre* is not from Being to language but from language to prayer. When the Word is confessed as foundation, the silence of the clearing becomes the prelude to praise.

The final note, then, is not condemnation but benediction:

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” — Isaiah 40 : 8

Concluding Reflection — From the Clearing to the Cross

“He stood in the clearing and called it Being; the Christian stands in the Light and calls it Lord.” — S. C. Sayles

At the end of *Without Foundation*, Sayles does not merely critique Heidegger; he redeems the question that produced him. The book closes not with condemnation but conversion — not Heidegger’s, but the reader’s. It invites philosophy to acknowledge what it has always already confessed: that the question of Being is the shadow of revelation, the echo of a Word once spoken and still reverberating through all thought.

The central argument of Sayles’s theological metaphysic can be restated thus:

1. Heidegger’s philosophy represents the intellectual conscience of modernity — its longing for meaning without metaphysics, its reverence without revelation.

2. The *Kehre*, or turn, from Being to language, signals not progress but exhaustion: philosophy returning to speech, the last refuge of meaning after the failure of system.
3. Reformed theology interprets this movement not as apostasy alone but as confession — the involuntary witness of the fallen intellect to its own dependence upon the Logos.

Sayles's own voice, clear throughout the work, oscillates between admiration and lament. He names *Being and Time* "one of the greatest books in the history of thought," yet insists that its greatness lies precisely in its failure — the splendour of an edifice built without foundation. The tragedy of Heidegger is not that he rejected God but that he sought Him so earnestly and stopped one word short of hearing.

In Sayles's reading, *Heidegger's hut* at Todtnauberg becomes a parable of the modern mind: brilliant, disciplined, solitary — and unfinished. It is a shrine to the intellect's longing for home. But philosophy cannot build its own dwelling, for "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127 : 1). The clearing can be swept, the silence prepared, but the Light that enters it comes only by grace.

Heidegger's "waiting for the last god" thus becomes, in Sayles's Reformed theology, the world's unconscious Advent — the ache of creation for its Redeemer. What philosophy calls the "oblivion of Being" Scripture names the Fall; what Heidegger seeks in *Ereignis* (the event of Being) the Christian beholds in *Incarnatio* (the Word made flesh). The Logos is the true Ereignis: the event not of disclosure but of descent.

Van Til's doctrine of the antithesis provides the structural frame: every human thought is covenantal. There is no neutrality in the clearing, for light and darkness cannot dwell together. Heidegger's greatness lies in his honesty — he recognised the darkness. His failure lies in mistaking it for illumination.

Sayles's *Without Foundation* therefore stands as both critique and confession of modern philosophy itself. It refuses the easy

polemic of dismissal and replaces it with the harder charity of understanding. Heidegger is not the enemy of faith but its mirror; his silence is theology's negative image.

The final pages return, as all Sayles's works do, to the Cross. "Only at Golgotha," he writes, "does the clearing become luminous; for there the Word speaks through silence, and the foundation is laid not in logic but in love." The Reformed mind, in echo of Calvin and Augustine, hears in the Logos the restoration of every fallen ontology. Revelation is not supplement but structure; not afterthought but architecture.

Thus the great philosophical circle from Descartes to Heidegger closes not with a system but with a Person. Being ends where the Word begins. The Logos stands where metaphysics collapses. And the hut in the forest, lit by the faint fire of human longing, becomes the manger of intellectual redemption.

Footnotes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927), §§ 1–44.
2. —, *Brief über den Humanismus*, in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1976).
3. —, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1950).
4. —, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959).
5. —, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1989).
6. —, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969).
7. S. C. Sayles, *Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger* (Evolsiay Tulip Academia, 2025).
8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
9. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1955).
10. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Word Publishing, 1976).
11. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1968).

12. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 1991).
13. John 1 : 1–5; Romans 1 : 18–23; Psalm 46 : 10; 1 Corinthians 3 : 11; Isaiah 40 : 8.
14. See Sayles's correspondence in *Kairos: The Logos-Centred Chronosophy* (Evolsiay Tulip Academia, 2025), where the doctrine of revelation as information-structure is elaborated.
15. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976).

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- **Sayles, S. C.** *Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger.* Evolsiay Tulip Academia, 2025.
- —. *Kairos: The Logos-Centred Chronosophy.* Evolsiay Tulip Academia, 2025.
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The Book

WITHOUT FOUNDATION

CONTENDING HEIDEGGER

Is available from Amazon from November 2025

Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger

By S. C. Sayles

“Being without the Word is a shadow without light.” — S. C. Sayles

When Martin Heidegger asked the question of *Being*, he reignited one of philosophy’s most ancient fires—and in doing so, exposed one of its deepest voids. *Without Foundation: Contending Heidegger* is theologian-philosopher **S. C. Sayles’s** profound examination of that question and of the metaphysical homelessness it reveals within modern thought.

From his childhood in Messkirch and early Catholic training to the composition of *Being and Time* and the solitude of the Black Forest hut, Heidegger’s life was the pilgrimage of an intellect seeking ground after the collapse of metaphysics. Yet, as Sayles shows, that pilgrimage was never purely philosophical; it was the drama of faith estranged from confession. The *Lichtung*—Heidegger’s “clearing” of Being—becomes, in Sayles’s interpretation, the world’s unconscious anticipation of the Logos, a sacred architecture left unfurnished.

With remarkable erudition, Sayles unfolds the movement of Heidegger’s thought from the phenomenology of Dasein

through the *Kehre* (“turn”) toward language, poetry, and silence. Each stage reveals not only the brilliance of the philosopher but also the ache of a world that has forgotten its Word. Drawing on the great witnesses of the Reformed tradition—Calvin, Augustine, Van Til, Henry, and Schaeffer—Sayles exposes the theological undercurrent within Heidegger’s project: the yearning for revelation disguised as ontology, the echo of faith in the speech of unbelief.

Sayles writes with both admiration and lament. *Being and Time*, he insists, is “one of the greatest books ever written—and one of the most tragic, for it built a cathedral of thought without a cornerstone.” The book’s strength lies in its dual posture: at once reverent toward the mind that shaped modern philosophy and uncompromising in its call to return that mind to its Maker.

Through its fourfold progression—biography, critique, theology, and doxology—*Without Foundation* traces the collapse of human autonomy and the recovery of divine revelation. It begins in the forest of questioning and ends at the Cross, where silence becomes speech and philosophy’s clearing becomes the place of worship. Sayles’s Logos-centred vision restores to ontology what the twentieth century forgot: that Being is not ultimate, but spoken—that the Word is the first and final foundation of all reality.

In lucid, poetic prose that bridges scholarship and devotion, Sayles gives the definitive Reformed answer to Heidegger’s most haunting insight: “Only a god can save us.” For the Christian philosopher, that god has come; the Word has been made flesh. *Without Foundation* stands as both an elegy for metaphysics and a hymn to the Logos who redeems it.

Profound, searching, and unsparingly honest, this book invites readers to reconsider the modern inheritance of doubt and to recover the joy of truth restored. It is an intellectual pilgrimage through the ruins of philosophy to the unshaken ground of revelation—the foundation once rejected, now laid again in Zion.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” — 1 Corinthians 3 : 11